United Nations A/CN.10/PV.203

General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

203rd Meeting
Wednesday, 24 April 1996, 5 p.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Hoffmann . . . . . (Germany)

The meeting was called to order at 5.20 p.m.

Organizational matters

The Chairman: I am happy to announce that I have received a note verbale from Uganda, nominating the Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania as a Vice-Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for 1996.

May I take it that the Disarmament Commission elects by acclamation the Permanent Representative of Tanzania as a Vice-Chairman of the Commission for 1996?

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I congratulate the delegation of Tanzania.

We still have the problem of a third substantive agenda item. The question is whether we can agree right away that we have a problem there, or whether we should have another round of informal meetings. Does any one want to have an informal meeting? That seems not to be the case.

It has become clear from my conversations with various delegations that we are not going to be able this year to agree on a third item, because we could not find a formulation on nuclear-weapon-free zones that would be agreeable to everybody. Therefore, I conclude that this year we cannot do other than to work on two items. That will not be a precedent for the coming years, of course; we will endeavour to find three items for next year. In this connection, I would also like to point out that we will not diminish the time slot that is available for the Disarmament Commission. We will go back next year to the normal time of three weeks and one day, from which we were obliged to deviate this year and last, when we were in an emergency situation.

On Friday morning I will discuss with the Bureau how to bring this about. I think what we should be doing is having a look at ideas that were brought forward during the general debate and collect a provisional list of agenda items with a view to avoiding last-ditch, last-minute efforts to come to terms with our subject-matter. We will probably come back to this next week.

I propose now that the Commission adopt the provisional agenda (A/CN.10/L.38) in a slightly modified form, omitting item 5 and renumbering the following items accordingly. May I take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the provisional agenda, as orally revised?

The provisional agenda, as orally revised, was adopted.

The Chairman: This means that we will also renumber the working groups. Working Group I will be on international arms transfers, and Working Group II will be on the exchange of views on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. This will be reflected on next week's calendar.

Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Once again, I thank you, Sir, for your tireless efforts to try to reconcile the various

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viewpoints on the complicated question of a third substantive agenda item. We can only express our profound regret that we have not managed to reach an agreement on this item.

The item that had been under consideration was viewed favourably by the majority, but has not been accepted owing to the opposition of one delegation. We cannot accept the elimination of the third substantive agenda item unless the delegation which opposed its inclusion explains its reasons, and provided that we decide on this item when we meet next year. We should avoid further confrontations in the future.

We would like to know now that this agenda item will be considered next year.

The Chairman: We all know that our difficulties stem from the position of one delegation, which is not present at the moment and which therefore cannot give the explanations that the representative of Syria has asked for.

However, while it is true that we are working under the rules of the General Assembly, it is also true that, customarily, the Disarmament Commission does not take votes. This means we have always taken decisions on a consensus basis and I intend to keep it that way. Therefore, we have no alternative but to drop the third item this year. Next year, of course, will be a new ball game, and I am sure that there will be new proposals that will also include this item. We will certainly work on it.

Mr. Rivasseau (France) (*interpretation from French*): Obviously, France also regrets that the third substantive item cannot be included on the agenda. We are not particularly requesting consideration of that subject; it is just that we feel that it would have been useful for the disarmament community and for all States interested in this concept to be able to exchange their experiences.

I think, as our colleague from Syria said and as you yourself mentioned, Mr. Chairman, we must draw lessons from what has happened this year. We must try to deal with it even earlier than we did this year. I think that it would actually be good to separate ourselves from the issue during this session of the Disarmament Commission on the common understanding that that issue would be a useful topic for next year. I think, as the delegation referred to is not represented here, we can decide on this item without being opposed.

The Chairman: We have taken our decision. I do not want to prolong this; I imagine that members are on speaking terms with each other and can get all the explanations that they want bilaterally.

Mr. Hosny (Egypt): Allow me to add my voice to those of my colleagues from Syria and from France. Allow me, first of all, Sir, to thank you for all your efforts to make this work; but, unfortunately, it has not.

We would like to express our deep regret and disappointment that, due to the fact that a few delegations blocked consensus on the inclusion of a nuclear item for this year, we are not able to include one.

We would also like to say that my delegation and other delegations attach great importance to such an item. We hope that during its next session the Disarmament Commission will tackle it effectively, without facing the same problems we faced this year. As another delegation has said, if there is a specific reason why we should not open this matter, the delegation concerned should come forward and speak clearly and openly, and explain the reason for the situation that we now find ourselves in.

My delegation too would like to have some sort of a gentlemen's agreement that next year we will handle this item appropriately.

The Chairman: The key word is "appropriately". I am sure we will all make strenuous efforts to come to a common solution.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): First of all, allow my delegation to thank you, Sir, for the tireless efforts you have made regarding the inclusion of a third item. As members know my delegation has done and tried everything in the group and in the Commission to achieve a consensus formula on this item. It was not possible, owing to the need for unanimous consensus, if members will allow that expression. We regret that; however, the Disarmament Commission should not have lost the benefit of a third item, devoted to nuclear issues.

I would also like to go back somewhat to a very attractive proposal which was made by the Mexican delegation during the general exchange of views, for compiling a list of alternative issues which could possibly help us if we do not find an agreement regarding some kind of wording for this matter.

The Chairman: That was exactly what I had in mind when I said that we should take some time next week to discuss the way forward. I will take this up with the Bureau, as I said, at our Friday meeting.

Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I apologize for speaking once again, but we would like to hear the delegation of India state its view on the inclusion of this item on next year's agenda. We would also like the report we are to adopt at the end of our session to include this issue. We need to decide on this question of principle now so that it can be included in the record.

The Chairman: It would be very optimistic to think that we can decide on wording for next year's item at our meeting today.

Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I was not suggesting that; we are not in a position to determine the actual wording. If we could, however, leave this meeting with some understanding, that would mean that this issue could be included on next year's agenda without opposition.

The Chairman: I am still slightly puzzled, I must say, because if we take a decision now, the only thing we can do is to say that we will endeavour to include it on next year's agenda. If we run into the same difficulties that we have now, I do not see any way forward.

Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I would merely like to hear the views of India on the formulation of this question.

Mr. Kumar (India): I am flattered that our views, which are well known, are being sought. The Indian delegation would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your tireless efforts to find a solution to this issue. As far as the Indian delegation is concerned, we agreed to the suggestion you made last Friday on the topic of the "role of nuclear-weapon-free zones in the context of global efforts aimed at nuclear disarmament"; we agreed to it, and we can go along with it, provided other delegations can go along with it as well.

That in short is our position. I think the Syrian delegation will understand this very clearly.

Mr. Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): We hope that it will become the understanding of this session of the Disarmament Commission that there is overwhelming support for a discussion of the issue of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Our consultations over the past six months have proved that there is indeed overwhelming support for discussion of this matter in the Commission.

Because of certain problems, including finding an appropriate formulation, we could not discuss it this year. However, we hope that this will be possible through continued consultations between now and December, when there will be another organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

Since there is a possibility that we might conclude the item on international arms transfers, as well as the one on a fourth special session on disarmament, we could next year have the difficult task of finding three items. I think one good candidate is the question of nuclear-weapon-free zones. I think we should capture the sense of our consultations of the past several months and try to find an appropriate formulation that is acceptable to everyone.

The Chairman: It is not only an understanding but a plain fact, and a very apparent one, that there is overwhelming support for an item on nuclear-weapon-free zones. As the representative of Iran stated, we will endeavour to carry this forward.

Mr. Hanif (Pakistan): I wish to thank you, Sir, for your tireless efforts and for your patience in delaying your decision, which you have finally hammered into our heads, that we cannot have a third item on the agenda this year. My delegation is deeply disappointed that because of certain delegations the entire United Nations membership has been deprived of the opportunity to discuss an important item, a topic that all of us want to discuss. Because of this decision, we have a problem for the 1997 session: we shall have to decide on three new agenda items, which will be a difficult task, considering our experience of the last two years.

Accordingly, I share the view expressed by the delegations of Egypt, France, Iran and Syria that our discussions on next year's agenda items should start now and continue until December, and that we should endeavour to have some topic related to nuclear-weapon-free zones on the agenda in 1997. This is because there are countries that profess that nuclear disarmament should be pursued in a time-bound framework, but that are not willing to discuss measures at the regional level to start such a process. We feel that this item should remain on

the agenda and that an endeavour should be made to achieve consensus on this topic.

Mr. Sorreta (Philippines): I should like to thank you, Sir, for your tireless efforts in seeking a solution to this problem. Your efforts have always been accompanied by a great sense of friendship and humour, and this has been essential.

The Philippines wishes to express its disappointment at the situation we face, in which, though so many developments in the area of nuclear-weapon-free zones have come to a head, the item has now been pushed from our agenda to next year's — a year that might possibly be a very busy one, with the possibility of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and several other things.

Today, perhaps, we have seen how powerful a veto can actually be. Hopefully, we can come up with a formulation that can reflect the sentiment of the overwhelming majority here. We should also be able to reflect in our decisions that the agenda item should be included next year. I understand that we cannot dictate it at this point; we are in your hands, Mr. Chairman, when it comes to how to formulate this.

The Chairman: It will be a nice task for the Rapporteur to formulate our discussions on this subject.

Mr. González Bustos (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation, like others that have spoken before me, deeply regrets the fact that it has not been possible to include a third substantive item on our agenda for this year. We think that this would have been useful and important to strengthen the Disarmament Commission, especially as it deals with the nuclear issue and, more specifically, nuclear-weapon-free zones, which, as members are aware, are of particular importance to my country.

I believe that every effort was made; yet it was not possible to achieve consensus. We regret this situation, but given this fact, I believe that we should adopt measures during this session of the Commission to create some mechanism, as we suggested in our statement during the general exchange of views, to avoid a recurrence of this situation. I think that if we could use a bit of the time that we would in theory have allotted to Working Group III to try to find a solution, we should be able to make considerable headway on this. And taking advantage of the presence of the many delegations here, it would enable us to look into the possibility of preparing the lists of items that we had mentioned earlier, and that could be dealt with at a special meeting of the Disarmament Commission later on. They could be negotiated so as to establish a mechanism that would allow us to have available items on each of the issues covered by the Disarmament Commission, at least for the next five years.

The Chairman: We will consider that proposal.

Mr. García (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): First of all, Sir, like the colleagues who have spoken before me, I wish to thank you for your efforts to find agreement on a third substantive item for the agenda of the Disarmament Commission. It is regrettable that after the tremendous efforts made over several months, we have not been able to reach agreement on a third item. This highlights the need, which several other delegations have mentioned, to have beforehand a list of possible items that could be considered, studied and analysed by the Commission during its substantive sessions. This is a proposal that is worth taking into account and supporting so as to prevent similar situations from arising in the future.

Colombia is convinced of the need for such a list and of the need to include on it issues on which, at least in principle, agreement could be reached within the Commission. We do not think that we would be doing the Commission a great service if we were to select items that would not be agreed on after two, three, four, even five years of work, because that would be the best way to weaken the Commission. The Commission must obtain results. All of us here, all of us who have been participating in its work, have been doing so constructively, and I believe that neither our Governments nor our Ministers of Foreign Affairs would be satisfied if after five or even three years of work, the Commission had no results to show. The best way to strengthen the Commission is to produce results, and I think that that is the commitment that all of us involved in this process should undertake.

Programme of work

The Chairman: As concerns our schedule for this week, I would suggest that on Thursday morning we drop the meeting that would have been devoted to item 5. I will try to rearrange the schedule in such a way that Working Group II on SSOD IV can take over this slot on

Friday morning, but I will have to discuss this with Ambassador Erdenechuluun.

Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): When arranging the programme for the two Working Groups, will it be possible to avoid overlapping between the two Working Groups? We would appreciate that, but hope that it will not create delays.

The Chairman: That would mean that we had to cancel the Working Group on SSOD IV as well, and work exclusively on Working Group I. And, as we do not want to do this, I am afraid that there will be overlaps all the time. This is what we had decided upon, but tomorrow, for instance, there will be fewer overlaps.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.